

Civilians forced out by NATO raid



SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Serb fighters set villages ablaze and sent civilians fleeing for their lives Tuesday in northwest Bosnia, their response to a retaliatory airstrike by NATO warplanes.

Surface-to-air missiles were fired at two NATO jets flying over Serb-held Banja Luka. The British jets were not hit.

Senior officials of Croatia, site of Monday's NATO attack on a Serb-run airport used to stage bombing runs on a U.N. safe haven in Bosnia's Bihac area, said NATO had asked for and received permission to fly again over Croatia.

NATO had no immediate comment. But a NATO official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said any such request wouldn't necessarily signal another airstrike soon. Instead, he said, it could be forward planning to be able to respond quickly if the U.N. requests another bombing raid.

About 50 allied warplanes and supporting aircraft bombed the Udbina airstrip in Croatia, just across the border with Bosnia, in NATO's biggest attack ever. The airfield had been used three times the past two weeks by planes attacking the Bihac area, where there are a cluster of towns held by Bosnia's Muslim-led government.

Senior United Nations sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Serbs could overrun the U.N. safe haven of Bihac by late Wednesday.

They said U.N. envoy Yasushi Akashi would appeal to President Slobodan Milosevic of neighboring greater Serbia on Wednesday to try to halt the rebel Serb offensive.

Radovan Karadzic, the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, said the United Nations could expect severe retaliation for the airstrike.

"We will determine the time and the target of the revenge ourselves, but we will definitely make sure that it is painful for NATO nations," Karadzic told Bosnian Serb television.

The message of allied force appeared lost on the Serb besiegers of the Bihac pocket about 90 miles northwest of Sarajevo.

A U.N. spokesman, Lt. Col. Jan-Dirk von Merveldt, said Tuesday afternoon there was a "large increase" in artillery, machine-gun and small arms fire in areas around Bihac still held by Bosnian government forces.

The town of Bihac itself was cut off on all sides

except to the north, said U.N. officials.

Serb fighters rolled over several villages in the western part of the Bihac enclave, near the Croatian border, leaving them destroyed, abandoned or ablaze and their residents fleeing toward the town Tuesday.

Alarmed aid officials warned of an impending humanitarian crisis. Peter Kessler, a spokesman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, said about 8,000 civilians had fled villages under attack the past few days.

He said the area was running out of food and, in some places, potable water.

Kessler blamed Serbs in Croatia for obstructing UNHCR aid convoys: Only 12 convoys have reached the Bihac pocket since May, the last on Oct. 1.

"The situation is critical," Kessler said. About 180,000 people in the region depend on humanitarian aid.

The self-styled Bosnian Serb assembly was scheduled to meet in the Serb headquarters of Pale, just outside Sarajevo, on Wednesday to discuss the latest developments and surge in fighting.

In war developments Tuesday:

—Bosnian Serbs crossed the Una River south of Bihac town, presumably to link up with Serbs from neighboring Croatia moving in from the west, U.N. officials in Zagreb, Croatia, reported.

—Heavy fighting was reported just south of Bihac and on the strategic Grabez plateau, northeast of Bihac, with Serb forces apparently gaining the high ground overlooking Bihac town, a U.N. official said. There was a danger that the Bihac pocket could be cut in two, he added.

—Government troops were surrounded in Velika Kladusa, 22 miles north of Bihac and the former stronghold of Fikret Abdic, the renegade Muslim leader who broke with the Sarajevo government and sent fighters to help the Serbs. Local radio in Velika Kladusa said Abdic's fighters had entered the town's western suburbs and were moving into Bihac from the southwest.

Bosnian government officials blasted the United Nations and NATO for allowing artillery and soldiers in Serb-held Croatia to join in the fight.

Bosnia's Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic questioned the value of bombing the airfield at Udbina, but leaving intact artillery batteries that have caused the most death and destruction in Bihac area.

He also said it was "absurd" that forces inside one of Croatia's four U.N. protected areas should be allowed to attack Bihac, one of Bosnia's six U.N. safe havens. Such an incident occurred Saturday.

Iran aims for self-sufficiency to build Scud missiles

LONDON (AP) — Iran will be able to manufacture its own short-range Scud missiles in the next few years and is trying to develop a longer-range rocket based on Western technology, an aviation magazine reported Tuesday.

Tehran's aim is to become self-sufficient in producing missiles, according to the report in Flight International's Nov. 23-29 issue, which quoted documents from German Customs Intelligence.

With help from China and North Korea, Iran has been assembling its own liquid-fueled Scud-B missiles, with a range of 190 miles, for several years.

By the end of this year, Iran will be producing Scud-Bs using "a significant proportion" of locally manufactured parts and "in the coming years" it will attain complete self-sufficiency, the magazine quoted German Customs Intelligence as saying.

The German documents also confirmed that the Iranians are trying to make their own cruise missiles, based on Chinese-supplied Silkworm

antiship missiles, Flight International said.

Cruise missiles are smaller, more versatile and 10 times more accurate than longer-range ballistic missiles because they are guided right to their targets. A ballistic missile spends the last quarter of its flight in free fall, guided only by gravity.

Tehran is also working on its own longer-range, solid-fuel missile "which closely follows Western systems," the magazine quoted German Customs Intelligence as saying.

Military analysts said it is not surprising that Iran wants to become self-sufficient in missile production because there is always a possibility that missile shipments could be stopped.

"To some extent, one doesn't blame them," said Col. Andrew Duncan, spokesman for the International Institute for Strategic Studies. "They know that America is not going to give up on them. They're always going to be labeled as a terrorist supporter and a nuclear proliferator."

Norwegians ponder joining 12-nation EU

OSLO, Norway (AP) — In 1972, Aage Hovengen voted in favor of membership in the European Economic Community. Svein Ringstad voted against joining.

Next week, the two men are switching sides in the referendum on Norway's membership in the European Union — the EEC's successor. Their disagreement is a sign of the passionate, sometimes illogical debate as this Nordic nation of 4.3 million people decides whether to join the rest of Europe.

"We are different in Norway from other European countries," said Hovengen, 67. "We are a people of the mountains and fjords. We are used to being on our own and making our own decisions."

Ringstad, 44, now pro-membership, said Norwegians should not be that vain or insecure.

Polls show a majority of voters will vote "No" on Nov. 28, even though most also say joining would be best for Norway. Proponents hope recent "Yes"

votes in Sweden and Finland will encourage doubters — about 16 percent in polls — to say yes.

Ringstad, now active in an organization called "From No to Yes," said the fall of the Iron Curtain and new possibilities for Europe changed his view.

"The European Union developed into something looking into areas and adopting goals that I could support," he said.

The 12-nation EU, based in Brussels, Belgium, hopes one day to compete with the United States for world influence by unifying its economy, using a single currency and forging joint foreign and military policies.

Three other nations — Sweden, Finland and Austria — have already voted and will join the EU on Jan. 1.

Hovengen, now retired, changed his mind the other way during travels through Europe as a Labor member of Norway's Parliament.

"I used to visit the back streets, the slums, and the countryside

where the picture was grim. I knew we did not want Norway to be like that," he said.

Like many opponents, Hovengen fears that Norway — rich in oil, fish, metals and other natural resources — will give so much to the EU that there wouldn't be enough for its own generous welfare, employment programs and high standard of living.

Proponents of membership say rejecting the EU will cost jobs and cause industries to move south as the united EU economy takes off. They warn that little Norway will be isolated on Europe's northern fringe.

Ringstad said Norway needs a voice in Brussels and the Nordic countries together "will contribute the openness and democracy of our political systems."

EU supporters warn a "No" could close Norway out for decades, but Hovengen doesn't think so. "The door will always be open for Norway, because we have the natural resources that Europe needs," he said.

Haiti has turned a corner; storm toll mounts

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — The steady accumulation of small victories should convince even die-hard skeptics that Haiti, two months into a U.S.-led occupation, is on a path to democracy and development, the prime minister said Tuesday.

"Progress will be slow, but it will be every day," Smarck Michel said in an interview. "Nevertheless, it is a fragile situation because all the forces that do not want change are still there."

Benchmarks abound. The outgunned, demoralized armed forces backed down from confronting the occupiers. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was welcomed home from exile. The repressive police

are being purged and retrained.

Residents who fled this Caribbean port capital in early September before U.S. forces arrived have returned. With the restoration of Aristide, who was ousted by the army in 1991, a worldwide trade and oil embargo was lifted.

The military regime of Lt. Gen. Raoul Cedras and the embargo had brought Haiti to near collapse, so it is hard for some people to see things are getting better, Michel said. He compared the situation to a car going backward down a hill: It takes a "tremendous" effort just to make it stop, he said.

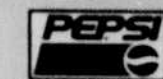
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